

**Fox Moth *Macrothylacia rubi* (L.) (Lep.: Lasiocampidae) in Orkney**

It was while out doing survey work on the hills at the south end of the Hoy, in the valley of the Burn of Ore that Tim Dean found a Fox Moth larva on 17 August 1999.

Hoy is an island that lies to the south-west of the mainland of Orkney. It is 16 km long by roughly 8 km wide, consisting of heather moorland from sea level to 479 metres, with a small area of agriculture in the northern-most corner and in the south-eastern corner.

Tim kept the larva and took it along for me to see. After discussion, it was decided that the larva would be left with me to see if I could take it through the winter. I read up on the subject and made some phone calls for more advice on how I should go about this. The outcome was that, though possible, it was not going to be straightforward to bring a Fox Moth larva through the winter. I settled for the cage in the garden as being my best bet. I dug a hole into which was positioned a bucket with a clump of Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* in it; there was also a small flower pot laid on its side with coarse, twiggy material in it for the larva to crawl into. The whole lot was then covered with net.

Initially, on being put in the cage the larva seemed to be doing all right, climbing up the vegetation during the day and feeding in full view. As the weeks went by it was seen less often, then not at all. After a few weeks of no sightings, I opened up the cage and all that could be seen were a few hairs. The cage was closed up, and left all winter, just in case, but no larva or moth appeared the following year.

Two years later on the 9 August 2001, while once more doing survey work, this time in the valley of Mill Burn three kilometres north of the first location, Tim found another Fox Moth larva; this one he left where he found it to get on with its life uninterrupted.

The Fox Moth is found in Sutherland and Caithness, and was one of the moths mentioned by Ian Lorimer in his book *Unfinished Business*. In the chapter titled "Lepidoptera Recorded From Sutherland and Caithness But Not From Orkney", he had drawn up a list of Lepidoptera that he felt, if not already here and not found at that time, could very well turn up some time in the future.

The discovery of the Fox moth on Hoy has left us with a small dilemma. In the past when people out on the Hoy Hills and saw a big brown moth go whizzing past it was assumed that it was a Northern Eggar *Lasiocampa quercus callunae*. That assumption can no longer be made, and at this time we do not know how widespread the Fox Moth is on Hoy.

As a means of determining how widespread the moth is, I have asked that when people are out on the hills and come across a Kestrel or Merlin plucking posts that they look for any wings which may be on the ground and check whether they were from a Fox or Northern Eggar. So far this has not yet borne any fruit.

It is hoped that in years to come we can establish how widespread the Fox Moth is on Hoy through field trips to look for larvae.— SYDNEY GAULD, Quayberstone, St Ola, Orkney.